

JADE REGENT



ECOLOGY OF THE KAMI

“KNOW YOU NOTHING, FARM BOY? I AM KAMI, AND YOU NEED NOT FLEE, OR FEAR. I AM WISER THAN THE WIND, STEADIER THAN THE STONE; I AM GUARDIAN OF THE INNOCENT, PROTECTOR OF SHRINES THAT HAVEN’T THE MEANS TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. I AM THE VOICE OF THE SACRED PLACES, FROM THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN TEMPLE TO THE MOST HIDDEN SHRINE OF THE VALLEY, AND FRIEND TO ALL THOSE WHO PAY THEM RESPECT.

“WHY DO YOU SCURRY IN ALARM? ARE YOU WICKED? FOR ONLY THE WICKED NEED FEAR KAMI, WHO ARE THE PROTECTORS OF ALL WORKS, THE SHIELDS OF ALL CREATIONS.”

—THE CHARACTER TEKI,
FROM A PLAY ADAPTATION OF THE *TAYAGAMA*

Kami are spiritual beings created by the gods and tasked with maintaining the balance of the natural world. This maintenance comes in the form of protecting the various creatures and things on the Material Plane that are often unable to protect themselves. Each kami has a particular “ward” that it watches over, such as an inanimate object, a plant, a creature, or even a region. Intelligent beings (such as most humanoids) and objects that exist outside of the natural order (such as undead creatures and constructs) do not have kami. One can predict the strength of a particular kami by the nature of its ward: A rock or frog kami may be a relatively impotent thing, but a redwood kami, a blue whale kami, or the kami of a mountain often exercises massive power. The vast majority of kami are good or neutral in alignment. Those rare kami who fall to evil—usually after failing their ward in some way—generally have their physical forms revoked by the gods, and are condemned to become wandering spirits who either perish in their aimless voyages or are pushed to become hateful and vengeful oni.

A kami forms an extremely intimate bond with its ward, melding with the object or creature the majority of the time and manifesting a physical body when it must protect the thing or otherwise chooses. A kami prefers its spiritual form more often than not, and assumes a physical form only when necessary, such as when it must communicate with mortals or shield its ward. While this manifestation leaves a kami vulnerable to death like any other mortal creature, the kami is almost always willing to make this sacrifice in order to protect its ward.

Not everything in the world has a kami, as there aren't yet enough kami to represent every individual object, plant, and animal; filling this gap, however, is their eventual goal, and kami fervently spread themselves across lands in hopes of pairing every creation with a kami spirit. This grand design began in Minkai, and in the past several thousand years the kami have proliferated across much of Tian Xia. It is unclear exactly which regions the kami hope to expand into next, though they can potentially exist in any environment, and the other continents—including those of the Inner Sea region—are clearly viable options.

KAMI AND WARDS

The inanimate object, creature, plant, or region with which a kami is paired is known as its ward. A kami does not possess its ward and therefore does not control it. While the relationship between kami and ward is a deeply intimate one, it is perhaps more accurate to think of a kami as simply inhabiting its ward. Once attached to one another, the two develop a strong interdependence. A kami may leave its ward in either its spiritual or physical form, but the kami must eventually return to its ward to rejuvenate its strength, and while immensely powerful magic can be called upon to

permanently separate kami and ward, nothing can break the mystical connection between them. A kami estranged from its ward for an extended period of time grows increasingly erratic; its powers wane significantly, and it is at serious risk of permanently losing its normally calm resolve, increasing the likelihood of the kami devolving into an oni. Wards whose kami have left them often show signs of premature aging or wear—animals become listless and appear ill, weak, or uncharacteristically skittish or aggressive; objects become brittle, lose their luster, or appear to wear down quicker; plants wither or lose their fragrance and potency; and regions slowly degenerate into dilapidated, ruined versions of their former selves.

Though kami are bound to defend their wards, this defense is always secondary to their defense of nature as a whole. Thus, a kami bound to a fox and a kami bound to a field mouse do not battle to the death when the former kills the latter. Predation, as well as death from old age, are part of the natural cycles laid down by the gods, and to end life in a matter fitting with one's station is all any ward—or its associated kami—can ask for. A kami whose ward dies in such an honorable manner still suffers ill effects, but will often either die itself shortly thereafter and be reborn as a kami attached to a new ward, or else set out to find another (and usually similar) ward to guard—in the aforementioned example, perhaps as one of the field mouse's offspring.

KAMI HISTORY

Created by the gods at the dawn of the Material Plane, kami were tasked with the sacred duty to multiply and shelter the gods' creations. The gods also established a set of labyrinthine rules known as the *Laws of Golden Perfection*, which affect every aspect of the conduct of kami and their interaction with the world and its inhabitants. Beginning in Minkai (which accounts for their extensive presence in that nation), kami have spread all over Tian Xia in compliance with this divine directive.

A kami who falls from grace or fails its ward because of negligence is punished severely, and may lose its status as a kami if the offense is serious enough. Most fallen kami accept this terrible fate if it comes to pass, becoming purposeless spirits who lack the ability to interact with the Material Plane at all. However, those who come to resent their status, or those driven mad by their homeless misery, become oni, evil spirits in the flesh. Oni exist in endless conflict with kami, resenting them for the favor the gods show them and for what the oni see as their misguided devotion to the divine directive to shield creation. (See “The Ecology of the Oni” in *Pathfinder Adventure Path #49* for more details on these vicious beings.) In contrast, oni see the world as a playground on which to indulge every base whim and desire that might cross their selfish and venal hearts. Though they often act in direct opposition to the

kami, oni too must abide by the tangled and voluminous *Laws of Golden Perfection*, but the cruel beings do their best to bend and manipulate these strictures in their pursuit of physical pleasures. Kami and oni recognize one another on sight, regardless of the form each has taken. Kami find oni to be dreadful embarrassments, or live in fear that they may one day fail in their sacred responsibilities and become oni themselves.

THE TAYAGAMA

This much-loved epic poem, written thousands of years ago by bards whose names have been lost to history, prominently features kami and oni. Like those creatures themselves, the poem has crossed numerous national borders throughout Tian Xia, becoming a shared touchstone for many different cultures. While comic exaggeration and hyperbole is its hallmark, the *Tayagama* also provides useful insight into both those mystical beings and the Tian peoples as a whole, as many varied cultural traditions often subtly tie back to the saga in some way. For instance, the most beloved of all kami presented in the poem is Teki, a fukujin who serves as the protagonist's guardian. As a consequence, Teki is a favorite name for a beloved pet in Minkai and several other nations. Several other cultural ties to the *Tayagama* include the following.

- It is considered an ill omen to name one's child after the protagonist of the *Tayagama*, Tayago, who in the end is killed by a vengeful oni. Tians often warn foolish children "not to follow in the path of Tayago."
- A tree or bush with a green cloth tied to it found along a path indicates that a hidden source of drinkable water or a plant bearing edible fruit lies nearby. This is a reference to the *Tayagama*'s protagonist, who comes upon a magic green scarf that guides him to that which he seeks when he lets it blow in the breeze. (Of course, in real life, bandits sometimes use this custom to trick unsuspecting or superstitious travelers into ambushes.)
- An adult who claps after sneezing reveals that she is a very superstitious individual. In the *Tayagama*, Tayago occasionally sneezes, blowing poor Teki away so that he must summon him back for aid by clapping his hands. This gesture, common among younger children, is considered silly by most adults.

KAMI-HUMANOID RELATIONS

Humanoid communities in Tian Xia have many different types of relationships with kami, and these variations are often related to the way in which a community interacts with its surrounding environment. Settlements that depend on cooperation with nature, such as those of farmers and herders, tend to coexist peacefully with kami. Citizens of these cooperative settlements often construct roadside shrines to kami, where they provide offerings of incense,

rice, wheat, milk, and so on. In these communities, nearby areas of wilderness are frequently honored by the people with celebrations and festivals intended to foster harmony with the neighboring kami. Most such festivals occur at the beginning of planting and harvest seasons. Cooperative communities frown on outsiders who do not show proper respect for the natural world or violate sacred areas, seeing this as a direct assault on the safety of their homes and the kami they live with.

Communities that sap the land via exploitation or extraction—such as through mining, fishing, or logging—tend to have tense relationships with neighboring kami. In these locales, shrines are often forbidding places, visited by designated representatives who bear offerings composed of materials that were taken from nature. For instance, those living near an iron mine may leave a dagger or bowl of arrowheads. Local ceremonies are geared toward appeasement of the spirits rather than thanking them, and dour festivals are intended only to avert kami's capricious wrath. Outsiders who anger local kami are treated with hostility for bringing misfortune upon a community, and the communities often demand recompense.

Places with naturally adversarial relationships with their environments—most notably urban centers—have difficulty maintaining relationships with kami. These larger settlements often try to appease kami in little ways, such as by constructing parks within city limits to placate the spiritual beings. More often, however, such communities resort to violence against kami, whom they see as enemies of progress or their industrial efforts. These settlements often place emphasis on setting up barriers and protections against kami, characterizing them as backward-minded monsters bent on destruction.

Of course, even communities that have hostile relations with kami of the forest, rivers, and hills may have better connections with the kami of inanimate objects, such as dosojins and zuishins. An urban scholar may have a playful and cooperative relationship with a book kami or the kami of a library, and a blacksmith might work closely with a furnace kami.

ORACLES, DRUIDS, AND RANGERS

Typically, people dedicated to the preservation of some sort of balance experience the greatest success in their interactions with kami. Of these people, the Tian oracles have much influence regarding the dealings of kami. Wealthier societies usually employ these mystics for the purpose of appeasing or wrestling with the neighboring kami. Many such mediums, however, wander the continent as itinerant priests who mediate on behalf of communities too small to support a permanent oracle. For a price, these seers aid settlers in mundane tasks to appease local kami, such as identifying the right place to dig a new well or plant a crop,

or how best to go about placating kami in potential mining, fishing, and logging areas. Such oracles might demarcate sacred regions of wilderness, establish and maintain kami shrines, and educate residents on achieving harmony with the spirits. Perhaps most importantly, these knowledgeable oracles identify what must be done to heal the breach if local kami have been severely agitated by humanoid activity. These oracles generally have the haunted curse, and always embrace a mystery that intersects with the natural world (such as life, metal, nature, stone, waves, wind, or wood). Most of these oracles are good or neutral in alignment, and while they tend to be hired by humanoids, at times they may actually side with kami to thwart unacceptable encroachments on the natural world.

The only reference to oracles in the famous poem cycle known as the *Tayagama* is to a charlatan named Hema Ri. Attired in clothes made of straw and owl feathers, with the wishbone of a chicken through his nose, this ne'er-do-well often contradicts Teki, the miniscule kami who serves as the guardian of the poem's hero. Without fail, hapless Tayago follows Hema Ri's advice, leading to comically disastrous circumstances from which the stalwart Teki must rescue him, only to have Tayago somehow attribute the positive outcome to the charlatan's supposed wisdom. While Hema Ri's role in the *Tayagama* is for the most part purely comical, insightful Tians know to garner important lessons from this character, as there are many such pretenders roaming the countryside. These con artists are most often lowly bards or sorcerers at best, swindlers who use their magical abilities to fool credulous country folk out of their money. True oracles do not take kindly to the manipulative games of these charlatans, revealing frauds with zest and allowing the victims of their deceptions to exact punishment.

Druids are as rare in Tian Xia as in other civilized parts of Golarion, though druidic influence in the Dragon Empires' rural communities is strengthened because of druids' peaceful relations with the populous kami. Though Tian druids are often hermetic and stick to the wilder regions within the nation, their reputation for upholding the sanctity of nature at all costs and steadfastly siding with kami in times of dispute makes them a feared force among many Tians.

Rangers, while typically associated with druids for their similar fascination with the wilds, ride the line between nature and society, and are more often seen as mediators between the sometimes incomprehensible dealings of kami and the acts of civilization. Though rangers are not regarded as highly as oracles in this role, they are often viewed as less cryptic and eerie, making them preferred

channels for Tians seeking immediate answers and aid in regard to kami interactions. Rangers may be more closely associated with animals rather than the land itself; such rangers usually work in close cooperation with these animals and their kami, whom they see as extensions of the animals themselves.

TYPES OF KAMI

The different types of kami exist in nearly endless variety. Listed below are brief descriptions of nine of the most common types of kami. Statistics for the jinushigami, kodama, shikigami, toshigami, and zuishin can be found in *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3*, while the others are detailed in the Bestiary of this volume.



TOSHIGAMI

KAMI SUBTYPE

Kami are a race of native outsiders who serve to protect what they refer to as “wards”—animals, plants, objects, and even locations—from being harmed or dishonored. All kami are outsiders with the native subtype. All kami possess the following traits (unless otherwise noted in a creature’s entry).

- Immune to bleed, mind-affecting effects, petrification, and polymorph effects.
- Resist acid 10, electricity 10, fire 10.
- Kami sleep, but do not need to breathe or eat.
- Telepathy.
- **Fast Healing (Ex)** As long as a kami is within 120 feet of its ward, it gains fast healing. The amount of fast healing it gains depends on the type of kami.
- **Merge with Ward (Su)** As a standard action, a kami can merge its body and mind with its ward. When merged, the kami can observe the surrounding region with its senses as if it were using its own body, as well as via any senses its ward might have. It has no control over its ward, nor can it communicate or otherwise take any action other than to emerge from its ward as a standard action. To merge with or emerge from a ward, a kami must be adjacent to its ward. In the case of a creature, plant, or object, the kami can emerge mounted on the creature if its body is at least one size category smaller than the creature. In the case of a location, the kami may emerge at any point within that location.
- **Ward (Su)** A kami has a specific ward: a creature with an Intelligence score of 2 or lower (usually an animal or vermin), a plant (not a plant creature), an object, or a location. Several of a kami’s abilities function only when it is either merged with its ward or when it is within 120 feet of its ward. If a kami’s ward is portable and travels with the kami to another plane, the kami does not gain the extraplanar subtype on that other plane as long as its ward remains within 120 feet. If a ward is destroyed while a kami is merged with it, the kami dies (no save). If a ward is destroyed while a kami is not merged with it, the kami loses its ability to merge with the ward and its fast healing, and becomes permanently sickened.



Dosojin (Travel Kami): Appearing at crossroads and along vast highways, dosojins represent the efforts of civilization to expand through travel and trade, taking as their wards both trails and roads. While a dosojin’s ward is often a remote road or far-off trail, these kami are known for being particularly social as well as helpful in regard to efforts toward humanoid expansion. Although they condone the growth and spread of humanoid

settlements, dosojins also seek a balance, and are quick to reprimand or outright abandon humanoid efforts if such expansions disregard their effects on nature and the wards of other kami.

Fukujin (Bonsai Kami): Peaceful and resolute, fukujins are small spirits that watch over the miniature trees of the same name grown by humanoids. While it is the eventual goal of many bonsai tree growers to attain a kami for her shrub, only the most patient and skilled gardeners draw the attention of such spirits. Those who garner the trust of a fukujin are often rewarded with sound advice about many different subjects, as the beings are exceedingly wise.

Jinushigami (Land Kami): The most powerful of all kami, these enormous spirits are the guardians of huge masses of land such as volcanoes, glaciers, and forests. They tower over most creatures, reaching heights of up to 40 feet and seeming to be composed of all elements of nature at once, including earth, stone, and plant matter. A jinushigami’s ward is an entire region, and when it is melded with its ward, the kami is able to see and touch all who traverse the expanse. Normally benevolent, jinushigamis aid travelers by manipulating the terrain around them as they travel through the kami’s ward, clearing paths and diverting disasters for those who respect the kami and their ways. However, jinushigamis can just as quickly turn on those who abuse their trust, bringing upon evildoers the wrath of entire landscapes, with disasters such as flash floods and rockslides punishing those who would seek to disrupt the balance of nature. Still more powerful are the elder jinushigamis, massive beings of legend who hold sway over entire mountain ranges, great reefs, and vast deserts.

Kaminari (Thunder Kami): These enormous kami dwell within the hearts of powerful storms, constantly beating upon their drums with bravado and boisterous glee. Kaminaris are known for caring about only two things on the Material Plane, their wards and their instruments, and most are only too happy to submit to this stereotype, as long as it allows them to play their music. While kaminaris often care little for the dealings of mortals, they are known to take great pleasure in conversing with bards, whom they see as fellow appreciators of musical arts. In the *Tayagama*, Tayago gains favor with a robust kaminari when he accompanies the thunder kami’s drumming with the melodies of a magical flute.

Kodama (Tree Kami): The typical spirits of wild trees, these kami appear as tiny bipedal humanoids. Usually a single uniform color with nothing more than dark spots denoting eyes and a mouth, these miniscule kami often function as a cohesive group, relying on their numbers to protect the forests they dwell in. The emergence of numerous kodamas from their wards can be startling to the uninitiated, but as long as trespassers don’t seriously perturb the surrounding forest, they find the kodamas

no more than curious distractions. In fact, encountering kodamas is often considered a good omen for travelers, as they are indicators of a healthy, peaceful forest. However, those who disrupt a wooded area will find kodamas capable of causing considerable harm to interlopers, especially if such miscreants are mounted. These kami have a great deal of influence over the flora around them, and can direct the foliage to hinder and trip foes when necessary, shifting from tree to tree to hide their positions and using the element of surprise to attack when they have to.

Shikigami (Garden Kami): These fragile beings attach themselves to small humanoid-made objects and works of civilization: garden statuaries, stepping-stones, and other minor works of art. Their physical form is in some ways like that of kodamas—vaguely humanoid in shape—but they resemble actual living beings even less than the tree kami, and sometimes wear miniature humanoid affectations like hats and jewelry made of base materials such as straw and rope. A shikigami is about 2 feet tall and is marked with a single rune on its chest. It is common to see stone statues in gardens and along walkways that represent these quiet spirits, and some Tian spellcasters manage to employ shikigamis as familiars.

Suijin (Water Kami): As the guardians of lakes, ponds, springs, and other relatively small bodies of water, suijsins wield the powers of water in their efforts to protect their wards. Regarded as mystical and mysteriously beautiful, these spirits are known for their varying temperaments as well as their strange rituals in the dead of night. Aloof as far as kami go, most suijsins interact with humanoids only when absolutely necessary, preferring to let things run their natural course, much like the waterways which they steadfastly watch over. But when a suijsin's ward is endangered, it can prove a powerful adversary, and those who live in concord with other nearby water kami can call upon the great koi-serpents in times of need.

Toshigami (Blossom Kami): Toshigamis are unique in their attachment to those places and things related to the passage of time, and are thus quite powerful. A toshigami's physical form is that of an old woman seemingly made out of a cherry tree—half of the form blossoming, the other half barren—and wielding a staff that possesses the powers of both youth and

old age. These kami represent the beginnings and endings of all things, and are often honored by spiritual Tians through the celebration of cherry blossoms every spring. Because of their relation to both birth and death, however, most people have a very ambivalent response to these kami, seeing them equally as bringers of life and harbingers of death. Toshigamis are capable of manipulating the flow of time, and can be quite dangerous if incited.

Zuishin (Shrine Kami): Guardians of torii, gateways, and holy places, zuishins are watchful stewards who see themselves as the ultimate enemies of oni. Wielding halberds for close-quarters fighting and bows to ward off foes at a distance, zuishins take great pride in their weapons and the art of combat. Appearing in their physical form as floating, legless samurai, zuishins are always peaceable and helpful to other kami, but non-kami must earn the trust of these individuals before gaining their aid.



JINUSHIGAMI